The Relationship between EFL Learners’ Behavioral Patterns in Learner/Teacher Centered Classes and the Proficiency Level of the Learners

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**ABSTRACT**
The present study was carried on to investigate the relationship between EFL learners’ behavioral patterns in learner/teacher-centered classes and the proficiency level of the learners. It is believed that as one moves up from one level of proficiency to another, classroom interaction becomes less teacher-centered and learners have a bigger share in classroom discourse. The participants of the present study were 180 female students of nine EFL classes majoring in ‘Interchange 1’, ‘Interchange 3’, and ‘Passages 2’ books at Sadr English language institute. In each of the classes under study, a total of sixty minutes of classroom interaction was tape-recorded, thirty minutes of which was randomly chosen for the sake of the present study. The tape-recorded data were later analyzed based on Brown’s Interaction Analysis System (BIAS). A post hoc sheffe test was conducted to shed light on the differences. It was revealed that learners showed the most responding behavior at the advanced-level classes, and they showed less responding behavior at the intermediate classes, and they showed still less responding behavior at the elementary level classes. The results also showed that teachers had the most frequency of talking at the elementary level classes, and they had the least frequency of talking at the advanced level classes. Teacher talk at the intermediate classes was in between.

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**Introduction**
Interpersonal interaction and the survey of the behavioral patterns are thought of as a fundamental requirement of foreign language acquisition (hereinafter FLA). Many researchers have stated that language instruction requires the development of interactional competence, and interaction is a fundamental element of language teaching for communication (Rivers, 1987; Ellis, 1988). The interactionist perspectives in FLA have considerably emphasized the role of interaction in general, and meaning negotiation and behavioral patterns in particular, with respect to the conditions which are theoretically important for FLA.

It is very important that teachers construct an interactive learning environment in which learners can communicate with each other in the target language and negotiate meaning by means of interaction. The more learners participate orally, and the more they engage in the negotiation of meaning, the better they will acquire the language. Research studies have shown that this kind of learning may result in (a) higher student’s achievements and greater productivity, (b) more caring, supportive and committed relationship among students, and (c) greater psychological health, social competence and self-esteem. In order for any classroom to be a fruitful experience, there should be some sort of interaction between students and the teacher so that they can exchange opinions and produce knowledge. Sinclair and Brazil (1982) have identified three aspects of teaching in traditional classrooms, i.e., the subject matter of lessons, the organization of lessons and the disciplinary element, in all of which teachers are involved in ‘telling things to pupils’, ‘getting pupils to do things’ and ‘evaluating the things that pupils do’. Sinclair and Brazil believe that foreign language classrooms differ little from traditional classrooms where the teacher takes the controlling role and conducts a fairly ritual conversation with students. The learners behave mainly as one many headed participant, avoiding cross conversation and acknowledging dominance of the teacher in their verbal behavior.

Classroom interaction is a controversial issue, and it usually depends on the socio-linguistic relationships between the teacher and the students. The students’ level of proficiency is one of the sociolinguistic factors which is the subject of the present study. This study investigates the responding behavior and interaction of EFL learners; in other words, this study tries to find out if learners with different proficiency levels show more responding behavior and interaction than teachers in the EFL classes.

**Review of literature**
Interaction refers to the facility in using a language when the attention is focused on conveying and receiving authentic messages. (Rivers, 1987) Teachers make adjustments to both language form and language function in order to help communication in the classroom. Learner-centered and teacher-centered interactions are natural processes that occur in the classroom and the frequency of their occurrence depends on certain factors. One of the important factors affecting the nature of class interaction might be the students’ level of proficiency. Observation of many different classes both in content area subjects and in language instruction consistently show that teachers typically do between one half and three quarters of the talking in the classroom. This finding is partially explained by Bellack, Herbet, Kliebard and Smith’s (1966) observation of four classroom discourse moves. His observation has revealed that structuring, soliciting and reacting are usually restricted to the teacher, and only responding behavior is typically restricted to the students.

Behavioral patterns are initiating behaviors, responding behaviors and silence behavior that occur in the classes. It is important to know what happens inside classrooms. Descriptive frameworks in the Interaction Analysis tradition aim to analyze...
classroom interaction in order to find out something about the sort of teaching and learning going on. To this aim, some evaluation systems were provided. (Amidon and Flanders, 1967; Flanders, 1970; Newman, 2004) Brown's Interaction Analysis System (BIAS) (1975) is one of these systems which is as follows:

The behaviors consist of different subcategories that are described in the above-mentioned table. This system is a simplification and a reduction of Flanders’ (1970) original ten categories. This system consists of seven categories of verbal behavior. The first three categories are connected to the teacher talk and the next two categories are related to the student talk.

To evaluate a class regarding the interaction of the teacher and the students, we need to observe the class and use a system to record the events. Nunan (1987) stated that interaction analysis involves the use of analytical observation schemes, and it focuses on the social meanings inherent in classroom interaction.

Yousefi and Koosha (2013) employed Brown’s system, and they investigated the degree of teacher- vs. student- centered classroom interaction in the MA courses of three different fields of TEFL, General Linguistic, and Translation Studies at Islamic Azad University of Khorasgan, Isfahan. They used different types of analysis. They employed an analysis of variance, the Chi-square test, and also an independent-samples t-test to check whether the obtained differences were meaningful. Post hoc Scheffe test was also conducted to see the exact differences. A researcher-made questionnaire was also used to study the reactions of the students. The findings showed that although the investigated fields varied from each other regarding of learner/ teacher interactions, the differences, except in the case of Responding Behavior, were not statistically significant.

All wright (1980), using audio taped data from two parallel UCLA low-level ESL classes, concluded that the teacher has a vastly disproportionate number of turns compared with other participants and that most of them have the function of "discourse maintenance", that is, taking an unsolicited turn, when a turn is available. He adds that the teacher also does almost all the interrupting and is even among those guilty of turn stealing. This phenomenon might be partly explained by teachers' intolerance of silence. Richard and Lockhart (1994) pointed out that in many classrooms, students have few opportunities to ask and answer the questions; teacher may address their questions to only a few students in the class that are laying within their action zone [students whom the teachers make eye contact, address questions, and nominate during the class].

According to Johnson (1995), despite the fact that student / student interaction allows students to interact with one another teacher still maintain a certain amount of control over the structure and some times , even the content of student – student interaction.

This study
Participants, instruments and procedure

The present study tried to investigate the types of interaction between teachers and students. Moreover, it studies the potential difference between the proficiency level of the students and their types of interaction.

The participants of this study, 180 female students of nine EFL classes, were selected from among 270 students majoring in Interchange 1, Inter change 3 and passages 2 books at Sadr English language institute. Three classes at the elementary level, three classes at the intermediate level, and three classes at the advanced level were selected through administering an Oxford Placement Test (OPT) as a screening test. This screening was absolutely necessary because the participants had to be homogeneous in order to take part in the subsequent tests.

In this study, Brown's interaction analysis system (BIAS) will be used to analyze the data in terms of the quality and quantity of interactions. In order to implement the BIAS system, a tally sheet is used and marked every three seconds for the duration of the observation.

A total of nine classes of Sadr institute were chosen for the sake of the present study. In each of these classes a total of two teaching sessions were tape-recorded. During each session, lasting ninety minutes, sixty minutes of classroom interaction was tape-recorded. Because of the volume of the study and the impracticality of handling the data, just thirty minutes out of sixty minutes was randomly chosen to comprise the data for the present study. The timings used for taped-recording of the classroom interaction were approximately the same.

It must be mentioned that the researchers asked for permission before observing and recording each class, in order to make sure that they did not mind about the presence of the observers. The percentage of time being spent in each category of BIAS was calculated. Percentages of teacher talk (categories 1 – 3), student talk (categories 3 & 5) and silence (category 6) as well as unclassifiable (category 7) were calculated.

The frequency, the proportion, and the mean score of teacher talk vs. student talk were calculated at different levels of proficiency. A univariate analysis of variance was run to see whether these differences were meaningful or not. A post hoc sheffe test was run in order to spot the difference, and to provide the researcher with more detailed information about those differences.

The results of the study

We can claim that success or failure in English language learning typically depends on the quality and quantities of interactions and behavioral patterns that take place during English language classrooms. It seems essential, therefore, for us to explore the relationship between the EFL learners’ behavioral patterns and their English language development. The present research was an attempt to determine the relationship between EFL learners’ behavioral patterns in teacher / learner centered classes and the proficiency level of the learners. According to descriptive statistics of teacher responding (TR) in table 4.1, there are differences in TR among the three levels of proficiency.

Teachers showed the most responding behavior at the advanced level and the least at the elementary classes. Their responding behavior at the intermediate classes was in between. To test whether the difference is meaningful or not, a Univariate Analysis of Variance was conducted. (See table 4.2) It was found that though there are differences among the levels with regard to the variable in question, this difference is not meaningful at 5% level of significance. A posthoc sheffe test was used to show the difference. This is shown in table 4.3 and 4.4.

This test revealed that at 5% level of significance one can say that there is a difference, but since the difference is not significant, it is not possible to say which levels differ most from each other and which levels differ least from each other. To better understand the result, a bar graph is provided. It was found that learners showed the most responding behavior at the advanced levels, less at the intermediate levels, and the least at the elementary levels. The descriptive statistics shown in table 4.5 demonstrate the point.
### Table 2.1 Brown’s Interaction Analysis System (BIAS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Talk</th>
<th>Initiation</th>
<th>TL</th>
<th>Teacher lectures, describes, explains, narrates, directs e.g., this is Brown’s procedure for coding classroom interaction.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
<td>TA</td>
<td>Teacher questions, about content or procedure, which pupils are intended to answer.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Talk</td>
<td>Response</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Pupils respond directly and predictably to teacher questions and directions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Initiation</td>
<td>PV</td>
<td>Pupils volunteer information, comments, or questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Silence, Pauses, short periods of silence.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Unclassifiable. Confusion in which communications cannot be understood; in usual activities such as reprimanding or criticizing pupils; demonstrating without accompanying teacher or pupils talk; short spates of black board work without accompanying teacher or pupil talk.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4.1 Descriptive statistics: Dependent variable: TR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of studies</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>22.167</td>
<td>16.15446</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>50.000</td>
<td>50.98627</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>59.500</td>
<td>23.65375</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>43.889</td>
<td>35.65998</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4.2 Tests of between – subjects effects: Dependent variable: TR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III sum of squares</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corrected model</td>
<td>4517.444(a)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2258.722</td>
<td>1.981</td>
<td>.172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>34672.222</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3472.222</td>
<td>30.414</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>4517.444</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2258.722</td>
<td>1.981</td>
<td>.172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>17100.333</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1140.022</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>56290.000</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrected total</td>
<td>21617.778</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4.3 Multiple comparisons: Dependent variable: TR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(I) level of studies</th>
<th>(J) level of studies</th>
<th>Mean difference (I – J)</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>95% confidence interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Intermediate 27.8333</td>
<td>19.49378</td>
<td>.385</td>
<td>80.7353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>Advanced 37.3333</td>
<td>19.49378</td>
<td>.194</td>
<td>90.2353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Intermediate 27.8333</td>
<td>19.49378</td>
<td>.385</td>
<td>25.0686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>Elementary 9.5000</td>
<td>19.49378</td>
<td>.194</td>
<td>-43.4020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>Advanced 37.3333</td>
<td>19.49378</td>
<td>.194</td>
<td>62.4020</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4.4 Homogeneous subsets: TR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of studies</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Subset (I)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22.167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>59.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig</td>
<td></td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The means were dose 

sections that 
sroom interaction. New 

s were more teacher –
– 
The study of teaching. 

s were more teacher 

Bellacket et al. (1966), Dunkin and Biddle (1974), and 


in which the learners uttered the most o

responding behavior than the learners and this is in opposition 

proficient ones. In all of the three levels teachers showed more

learners have a bigger share of cl

support Seliger (1983) who claimed that the more proficient

classroom discourse. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Legarreta's (1997) study in which teachers dominated the

from 50% to 82.2% and the average ranging from 68% to 72%

percentages of interaction time 

teachers do most of the talking with

traditional classrooms, teachers do most of the talking with

patterns in teacher / learner 

relationship between EFL learners' behavioural 

participated in the classrooms. New York: Rowley. 

Concluding note, it can be stated that although it was

revealed that elementary classes were more teacher–centered

than the intermediate classes , and the intermediate classes in

their own turns were more teacher–centered than the advanced

classes , any generalization based on the results of the present

study should be made cautiously.

The results of this study may be of benefit to EFL teachers, 
teacher trainers, and syllabus designers, as well as to the

learners. The findings may encourage teachers who still believe

in teacher centeredness in language to change their viewpoints in

favor of more learner – centered approaches. The findings may

also encourage teachers to focus on class interactions which are in

accordance with the students’ level of proficiency. The results

are especially of value to teachers in Iran in that they become

aware of what actually goes on in the classrooms, so that they

may not interrupt the current of the natural interactions that

occur in the classrooms.

References


